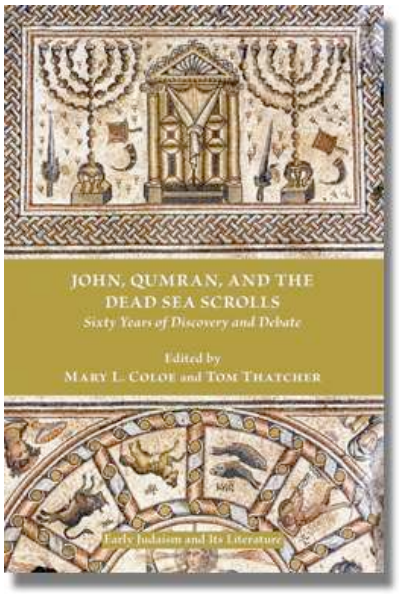
Rezension von: M.L. Coloe/T.Thatcher (Hrsg.) John, Qumran an and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Sixty Years of Discovery and Debate

Frey, Jörg

RBL 10/2013



Mary L. Coloe and Tom Thatcher, eds.

John, Qumran, and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Sixty Years of Discovery and Debate

Early Judaism and Its Literature 32

Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011. Pp. xv + 228. Paper. $28.95. ISBN 9781589835467.

Jörg Frey
University of Zurich
Zurich, Switzerland

The volume under review is the documentation of a panel discussion held at the SBL Annual Meeting 2007 in San Diego on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the Qumran discoveries, which was organized by the SBL John, Jesus, and History Group, in collaboration with the SBL Johannine Literature Section. The two editors represent these two groups: Mary Coloe the Johannine Literature section and Tom Thatcher the John, Jesus, and History Group. The concept and agenda of the panel was, however, strongly determined by the latter group, with Paul Anderson as the introductory speaker. The present reviewer was also a part of the panel but by then had decided not to contribute to the present volume.

Due to its origin, the volume does not aim at a comprehensive overview but combines three quite different accounts of research with six case studies as to how the Dead Sea Scrolls can be "applied to" Johannine texts. The program of the whole is most clearly set out in the overviews by Anderson and James H. Charlesworth, so their tendency must be critically discussed in light of present Qumran and Johannine scholarship. The six case studies are of quite different scope, range, and quality and will be discussed in due course. A few final remarks on the methodology of comparison will be appropriate in concluding the review.

In the introductory "Preface" (vii–x), the editors state that the Scrolls "have played no significant role in discussions of the Johannine literature over the past several decades" (vii). I am not so sure whether this is true. At least the magisterial commentary by Raymond E. Brown and also the second edition of C. K. Barrett's commentary did consider the Scrolls quite intensely, although Barrett finally concluded that the Scrolls did influence but not revolutionize Johannine scholarship. Admittedly, after the 1970s the stagnation in the publication of the Scrolls led to a decrease of interest among exegetes, and the very specialized views of recent Qumran scholarship are still barely known to "normal" exegetes. Furthermore, the awareness of the methodological problems in relating Qumran and Johannine texts has grown, so that more recent research has generally become more cautious against monolithic history of religions views. Of course, it would be a worthwhile endeavor to link Qumran scholarship in its present state of the art with Johannine scholarship, but it must be clearly stated that the present volume does not fulfill this desideratum, and in some of its contributions it seems to be rather stuck in older and outdated views of relating John with the Qumran Scrolls.

1. Three Different Surveys of Research and the Main Aspects of the Debate

In her sober survey of the last decade of Qumran scholarship (3–14), eminent Qumran specialist Eileen Schuller nicely lists some of the most important insights of recent Qumran research: It is (1) the publication of almost all remaining texts of the corpus, (2) a substantial rethinking of the core documents such as the Community Rule (S), the War Rule (M) or the Hymns Scroll (H), which are now available not only in one Cave 1 manuscript but in a larger number of fragmentary manuscripts that may allow one to reconsider their redactional history and character on a new material basis, and (3) the application of new methods, such as social-scientific approaches or ritual studies. Schuller makes no claims for the relevance of the Scrolls in Johannine studies. Her essay is a merely Qumranistic overview that does not enter the Johannine field.

It is quite different with Paul Anderson, who is not a Qumran scholar but quite busy in the Johannine discussion and one of the organizers of the John, Jesus, and History Group. Anderson's "John and Qumran: Discovery and Interpretation over Sixty Years" (15–50) is the most extensive contribution in the volume, providing a rich account of sixty years of relating John and Qumran, quite well informed in scholarship, however partly showing a tendency that deserves at least critical discussion.

It may be useful to know that already in the very early phase after the Qumran discovery scholars utilized the Scrolls not only for reconstructing an alternative milieu of the Johannine language within Palestinian Judaism (in contrast to the Gnosticism that Rudolf Bultmann had suggested as John's background). Some early authors (e.g., W. F. Albright)

even concluded that John, when located within a Palestinian Jewish context, might be more reliable historically in some details or even generally. Of course, Qumran scholarship has become much more cautious here, but it seems that these early views still appear attractive for some Johannine scholars: Anderson seems to share that initial optimism and phrases with strong rhetorical pathos: "The way that the scrolls illuminate the ministries of Jesus and John the Baptizer, and also the Fourth Gospel, has been highly significant" (20). The Scrolls, the Baptizer, Jesus and the Fourth Gospel—the line suggested here presupposes the historical validity of the calling narratives in John 1 and the relationship between Qumran or the Scrolls and John the Baptist. Recent research has seriously challenged both these assumptions.

In his review of the history of relating John and Qumran, Anderson claims, again with a bold rhetoric, that Qumran scholarship has replaced most of the presuppositions of Johannine interpretation before 1947, that is, especially of Bultmann's views. This is partly true, but the different aspects must be critically assessed: Anderson mentions (1) the view that John was primarily Hellenistic, not Jewish, and therefore distanced from Jesus and his world, (2) the view that "agency" belonged to a wider Gnostic redeemer myth from which the Johannine discourses are to be explained, (3) the view that Johannine religious forms were non-Jewish rather than Jewish-Christian, (4) the view that the Logos motif comes from Hellenistic speculation, and (5) the view of a somewhat monolithic (normative) Jewish messianism. Against these (partly generalizing) propositions of earlier scholarship, Anderson claims that the Scrolls have demonstrated or led scholars to acknowledge (1) that Johannine dualism is perfectly at home within Palestinian Judaism, (2) that agency is closer to the *šālîᵃḥ* motif rooted within the Mosaic prophet agency typology of Deut 18, (3) that the Jesus movement in its individuation from Judaism is illuminated by Qumran sectarianism, (4) that John's Christology is fundamentally Jewish, based on Gen 1 and Prov 8, and (5) the diversity of messianic expectations.

The claims mentioned here deserve a detailed assessment. In my view, not all of them are equally correct. Admittedly, the diversity of messianism in Second Temple times is a very clear insight from the Qumran discoveries, and the basically Jewish background of Johannine Christology was in fact rediscovered under the impact of Qumran studies, even though this background is illuminated by scriptural allusions and parallels in various Jewish texts rather than by direct Qumran parallels. The three other claims, however, should be considered more closely. As recent scholarship, especially by D. E. Aune, R. J. Bauckham, and also by the present reviewer, has demonstrated, the parallels between dualistic motifs in John and the (variegated types of) dualisms in the Scrolls cannot be explained by a direct Qumran influence on the Evangelist or his community but draw on different elements of scriptural and early Jewish tradition that are utilized and combined

in the language and composition of the Fourth Gospel. The fact that the early Jesus movement reflects some kind of "individuation" or individual religious "decision" is in a more general manner paralleled in early Jewish "factionalism" of the post-Maccabean period and also by a broader tendency toward individual religious options in the Hellenistic world (e.g., in philosophy, mystery cults), but certainly no direct impact of Qumran sectarianism. Further, the character and background of the Johannine view of the "agency" of Jesus is at least debated in present Johannine scholarship. The pattern of Moses and Deut 18 is one of the options, but this is certainly not predominantly Qumranic but also present in Samaritanism and in other early Jewish texts. Anderson's claim is true insofar the gnostic redeemer myth has faded away in the scholarship of the last decades, but this is neither new nor predominantly due to a Qumranic pattern that could have served as a substitute pattern.

In the main part of his paper (19–31) Anderson enumerates several attempts of relating John and Qumran, from the admittedly overexaggerated theories of Dupont-Sommer, Allegro, Wilson, and later Thiering to the more cautious views of recent scholarship. With obvious sympathy he refers to the assumption of a historical link between the Baptizer and Qumran, which (if John 1 is historically trustworthy) might then also lead to a link between the Beloved Disciple as a disciple of the Baptizer and thus under the influence of Qumran (20–21). Anderson reports the bold views of John Ashton and James Charlesworth that the Evangelist was thoroughly shaped by Qumran dualism and probably a former Essene and the even more daring view held by Brian Capper that the Evangelist "was an Essene" (22). The milestones of the John and Qumran discussion are enumerated: (1) in the 1950s, early studies by Kuhn, Burrows, Brown, and Albright identifying impressive parallels; (2) the important collection of essays edited by Charlesworth in 1972 discussing a number of themes by way of comparison; (3) important later articles by Charlesworth, Joseph Fitzmyer, and Daniel Harrington in the 1990s; and (4) some further, more critical studies that pointed to significant differences, such as by Bauckham and Aune. On these studies, however, Anderson comments that even differences "may reflect intertraditional contact" (31). This is a quite tendentious claim that is not further substantiated. Differences may, of course, imply the rejection of some views known to an author, but this is not necessarily the case. They can also simply show that the relationship is not very close. Anderson's sympathy, however, is obviously with those authors who argue for a close relationship between Qumran and John that is said to explain the thoroughly Jewish character of Johannine dualism and Christology.

Anderson finally browses through a number of significant topics that allow for a comparison. These include creation, dualism, pneumatology, the community dynamics, Scripture and its interpretation, the Baptizer's ministry, archaeological and topographical details, the teacher of righteousness and opposed figures, christological titles, and the

Two Ways and their implication. A more detailed comparison in those fields is certainly commendable, but I suspect it will not reveal compelling arguments for any direct dependence of John on Qumran but rather show interesting and sometimes important analogous phenomena, contextualizations, and so on. The close connection that Anderson proposes with respect to the aspect of dualism or to the connection of the Baptizer with Qumran is, in my view, no longer tenable. In the final part of his piece, Anderson also admits that similarities are no longer necessarily to be interpreted as evidence for firsthand contacts, but again he adds an unsubstantiated affirmation: "although some early contact likely existed" (50). Here I must again put a question mark. Anderson's survey is in some decisive points far too uncritical and still strongly dependent on earlier, exaggerated views like those of Ashton, Charlesworth, and others reckoning with a direct dependence between John and Qumran or at least with early contacts between Qumran and John the Baptist and thus with an ongoing tradition into the Jesus movement.

The concluding essay, James Charlesworth's "The Fourth Evangelist and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Assessing Trends over Nearly Sixty Years" (161–82) is also a kind of research survey. It was held as a public lecture and is thus shaped by a somewhat popularizing rhetoric that does not help to advance the scholarly discourse. Moreover, there are some overlaps with Anderson's essay, so that I can discuss Charlesworth's view quite briefly here. In numerous quotations from other scholars Charlesworth emphasizes how Qumran, in his view, has revolutionized Johannine research. Some of the aspects are in fact remarkable; others appear rather insignificant. It is true that Qumran has helped scholars to recognize the Jewish background of John, and numerous details in John can confirm this. On the other hand, the view that the Johannine language is preformed by the dualistic language in Qumran cannot be maintained. Even if there are some similarities with the Treatise on the Two Spirits, this text is also unique in the context of the Scrolls and possibly did not originate within the community but in a sapiential precursor movement. Moreover, some of the "technical terms" emphasized by Charlesworth as an argument for a direct influence are not uniquely Qumran sectarian but also attested elsewhere in presectarian texts such as the Aramaic Visions of Amram or in other contemporary and later Jewish and early Christian documents.

2. "Application" in Five Case Studies

Turning now to the six application essays, I can be briefer and focus rather on Johannine scholarship. In general, the character and scope of the essays is quite different, and the relevance of the findings is often rather limited.

The contribution by Hannah K. Harrington, a specialist in Jewish purity and also in the Dead Sea Scrolls, on "Purification in the Fourth Gospel in Light of Qumran" (117–38) is a sober case study of how the Scrolls can be utilized. In contrast with older views holding that John is far away from all kinds of water rituals and eager to look for a replacement of Jewish purity, Harrington browses through Qumran purification texts and other early Jewish texts demonstrating how in early Judaism water (rites) could be associated with new life, atonement, revelation, and even the eschaton or the eschatological purification. Based on that survey, she concludes that the hints of water purification in John are not un-Jewish nor an empty ritual that merely needed replacement. In fact, the Scrolls and other Jewish texts already show that a metaphorical meaning of water purification had been developing, which is also visible in John. The innovative aspect is, of course, that purification comes to fruition in the person and work of Jesus, but the language and concepts of purification and their metaphorization are quite Jewish.

Another commendable example of the utilization of the Scrolls is given by the eminent Qumran specialist Loren T. Stuckenbruck in " 'Protect Them from the Evil One' (John 17:15): Light from the Dead Sea Scrolls" (139–60). In order to illuminate Jesus' prayer in John 17:15, Stuckenbruck draws a comprehensive sketch of early Jewish apotropaic prayers from the Scrolls and other writings, thus demonstrating that the view of the Fourth Gospel that the world is under the dominion of the evil one, the "ruler of this world," is conceivable in the context of contemporary Jewish piety. The vast variety of texts now accessible helps illuminate the background of these views and also their reframing in the light of Jesus' death.

George J. Brooke, another distinguished Qumran expert, is also well aware of the methodological problems of relating John and Qumran, and he explains them quite clearly in the exposition of his contribution on "Luke, John, and the Dead Sea Scrolls" (69–92). His essay focuses on motifs or traditions common to Luke and John and tries to explore whether these common elements can receive some explanation from Qumran texts. Here the discussion enters the difficult and highly debated field of John and the Synoptics, especially John and Luke. Brooke presupposes that John is independent from Luke, while both rely on common traditions that are then developed differently in the two Gospels. Without being able to enter this discussion here, it must be stated that the matter is quite complicated and that the view that John is dependent on Luke has won more supporters in the past decades of scholarship.

Brooke discusses three motifs, (a) the 153 fish in John 21:11 (a story paralleled by Luke 5), (b) the Sons of Light mentioned in Luke 16:8 and John 12:35–36, and (c) the "Son of God" mentioned in Luke 1:32–35 and more prominently in John, now illuminated by the famous "Son of God" text 4Q246. The explanatory value of the parallels, however, is quite

limited, and the analogies seem to be somewhat far-fetched. It is true that the title "Son of God" is primarily rooted in Judaism, and the parallel between 4Q246 and Luke 1:32–35 has often been noted. But it is questionable whether the Aramaic text, related either to a messianic figure or (in Brooke's view) to the claims of an opposed figure such as Antiochus IV Epiphanes, is able to illustrate the argument on Jesus' alleged blasphemy in John 10. The term "Sons of Light" is by no means uniquely Qumranic, so that the usage in Luke and John (only once in each Gospel) does not receive much elucidation from the Qumran parallels. Further, the reference to the Commentary on Genesis (4Q252) and its view that Noah's ark came to rest on Mount Ararat 153 days after the beginning of the flood—the number 153 is not even mentioned in the Qumran text—hardly provides an explanation for the number of the 153 fish in John 21:11. Brooke's suggestion that an early tradition with the 153 fish was later used in Luke, where the number of the fish and other elements were removed, is also far from being convincing. It is still more probable that the author of John 21 used Luke's story (either from tradition or from the Gospel), so that the insertion of the number 153 must be explained otherwise—if it will ever be explained.

In concluding his essay, Brooke mentions a number of further points of contact between Luke and John—Jacob traditions, the focus on the temple, and so on—and in all those contexts there is some Qumran material that might be adduced to illuminate the respective backgrounds. It remains doubtful, however, whether the material can also prove a common tradition between Luke and John.

John Ashton has been one of the more influential Johannine scholars of the last three decades. He is not only well-known for the daring view that the author of the Fourth Gospel "had dualism in his bones" (quoted in the present volume by Anderson, 21) but also for his conviction that John is in fact a kind of an apocalypse in reversed form. This means that the Fourth Gospel is a revelatory writing, in a way comparable with apocalyptic writings and including a number of elements of the apocalyptic worldview. This is, in my opinion, a quite interesting interpretation of the Johannine Christology (and will be discussed extensively in a forthcoming volume put together in honor of John Ashton and edited by Chris Rowland and Catrin Williams at Oxford University Press). In the present context, the question is only: Do the Qumran texts contribute to that view, and do we need them?

In his study "'Mystery' in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Fourth Gospel" (53–68), Ashton focuses on the term and motif of the *rāz nihyeh* known already from 1QS XI but much more extensively now from the sapiential texts (1/4QMysteries; 1/4QInstruction) that became fully accessible only in the 1990s. The term, which is difficult to translate ("mystery to come," "mystery of being"), refers to a hidden mystery, an order of creation

and history, including the eschatological visitation, that is, a kind of wisdom that cannot be obtained by all humans but only by a small group of elect or the knowledgeable who are exhorted to consider or meditate on that mystery. Ashton discusses the Qumran material, but without considering that the two wisdom texts mentioned are probably not specifically Qumran sectarian compositions but composed in pre-Qumran sapiential circles. In any case, 1QS XI shows that the term was also known and used within the community.

When reading John against this background, the Johannine community appears as a group similarly based on a hidden or higher wisdom (i.e., the revelation of Christ). But the simple analogy of two "revelation-based" groups is rather unspecific. The same is true for the aspect that the Qumranites and the Johannine group use the term "truth" for their special revelation and the loose analogies between the Johannine Logos (as creational power) and the Qumran view that all being and history is predestined by the creator. For Ashton these rather vague analogies show that the Qumran sectarians and the Johannine group lived according to a revealed mystery and were, thus, both "apocalyptic" (but only in a very unspecific manner). However, Ashton does not consider appropriately the distinction between Qumran sectarian and nonsectarian or presectarian texts, nor does he draw the analogies in a sufficiently specific manner so as to substantiate a closer connection between John and Qumran. In the end, the superficial comparison provides not more than a confirmation for the view that John and the Qumranites lived according to a revealed "mystery" and were thus, in Ashton's terminology, "apocalyptic."

Brian Capper's "John, Qumran, and Virtuoso Religion" (93–116) is, in my view, the most problematic essay in the collection. It shows where uncontrolled speculation can lead to. Based on his earlier work on the communion of goods in Essenism and the Primitive Community, Capper wants to utilize the concepts of "religious order" versus "sect," classifying the Essenes not as a sect but as a religious order still in touch with the mainstream religion. This is based on Josephus's note that the Essenes sent dedicative gifts to the temple. In his whole argument, Capper fully draws on Josephus's description of the Essenes, uncritically linking this with different Qumran texts, including the Temple Scroll, which is most probably a presectarian text. He not only takes Josephus's number of four thousand Essenes in Judea as a historically accurate number but wants to interpret it in view of the mere number of male celibate Essenes, to which several thousand families of the second order should be added. In the end, large parts of Herodian Judea are members of the religious order of the Essenes or connected to it. Based on a passage from the Temple Scroll (11QTemp 46.13–18), he conjectures that also the villages of Bethany and Bethphage were Essene villages, so that Jesus' friends there, Lazarus and his sisters, whom Jesus loved, had been Essenes, and the relationship between Jesus and the Beloved Disciple is the relationship of two brothers of the same religious order. … I stop my

renarration of this kind of "science fiction"—the essay is far away from any kind of sound scholarship, both in the field of Qumran and in Johannine studies, and reminds one of certain types of Qumran "fantasy" literature.

3. Methodological Conclusions

The present book is only in some of its parts on the level of current scholarship, and it is remarkable that Qumran specialists such as Stuckenbruck and Schuller did a much better job than "mere" New Testament scholars like Anderson and Ashton. In working with the Qumran texts, there is a need for methodological sobriety, and the desire to find "parallels" or even support for some historical or exegetical viewpoints easily leads to a lack of caution or an overinterpretation of the fragmentary evidence. Doing sound history of religions work is one of the most difficult tasks in scholarship, and dealing with Qumran is not an easy field for Johannine scholars.

This does not mean that the Qumran texts are not valuable for exegesis. The opposite is the case, and I share the view of the editors of the present book that the treasure of the Qumran discoveries has not yet fully come to fruition in biblical exegesis. But it may lie at a different place than most exegetes have hitherto thought. Given the present state of the art in Qumran studies (as described by Eileen Schuller), we can now see that the Qumran corpus is not a mere "library of some Jewish sect" but represents a wide spectrum of the literary production of Second Temple Judaism of almost three centuries. Thus, the questions are no longer about the relationship between New Testament authors or groups with "the Essenes" or the Qumran "sect," nor should the primary interest be in discovering direct "influences" on the New Testament texts. In his thoughtful introduction to his essay in the present book, George Brooke confirms "that the discoveries in the Qumran library are indeed significant for the better understanding of many aspects of the New Testament texts. … However, the relationship between the two bodies of texts is not a simple or straightforward one" (69).

Simply collecting parallels (a symptom called "parallelomania") is futile and misleading. Instead, every parallel deserves cautious interpretation, considering its own original context, the possible ways of transmission, the nature of the suggested analogies, their possible reasons, and alternative explanations. Reading the New Testament texts in their contemporary Jewish context also calls for a broader perspective that includes not only the Scrolls but, as a matter of course, the Septuagint and all the "intertestamental" literature (partly transmitted in translations). We have to consider the texts from the Jewish Diaspora as well, Josephus and Philo, and also the early rabbinic texts, and we must not ignore the field of non-Jewish texts and genres from the Hellenistic-Roman

world. Only by such a wide range of research is it possible to decide reasonably on the background of a certain New Testament motif and its underlying concepts.

In such a wide textual framework, Qumran texts are a very valuable source, not for establishing direct links between the Johannine community or the Evangelist and Essenism or the Qumran sectarians, but for putting Johannine ideas or phrases in their Jewish (and other) contexts and to elaborate their profile as precisely as possible. The older views as represented by Albright, Charlesworth, or Ashton (let alone the speculations uttered by Capper) cannot be upheld any longer. All suggestions of any direct historical influence of Qumran or Qumranites, converted Essenes, and the like on the Johannine language, community, or authors remain speculative, but the interpretation of the texts gains depth, if the Johannine exegetes are well-informed about the problems and contexts of the documents from the corpus and their wider Jewish world. In more recent exegetical studies, the pendulum of scholarship has already swung back from a one-sided Jewish contextualization toward a more appropriate (and sometimes again one-sided) consideration of other, non-Jewish, Hellenistic-Roman contexts. Only the integration of both perspectives, at best in interdisciplinary cooperation, will finally lead to a balanced view.

This does not mean that Qumran might not have revolutionized Johannine scholarship, but it would be unwise to merely celebrate the revolution or even stay drunk from the sweet wine of celebrations without proceeding to utilize the new insights for a sober interpretation.